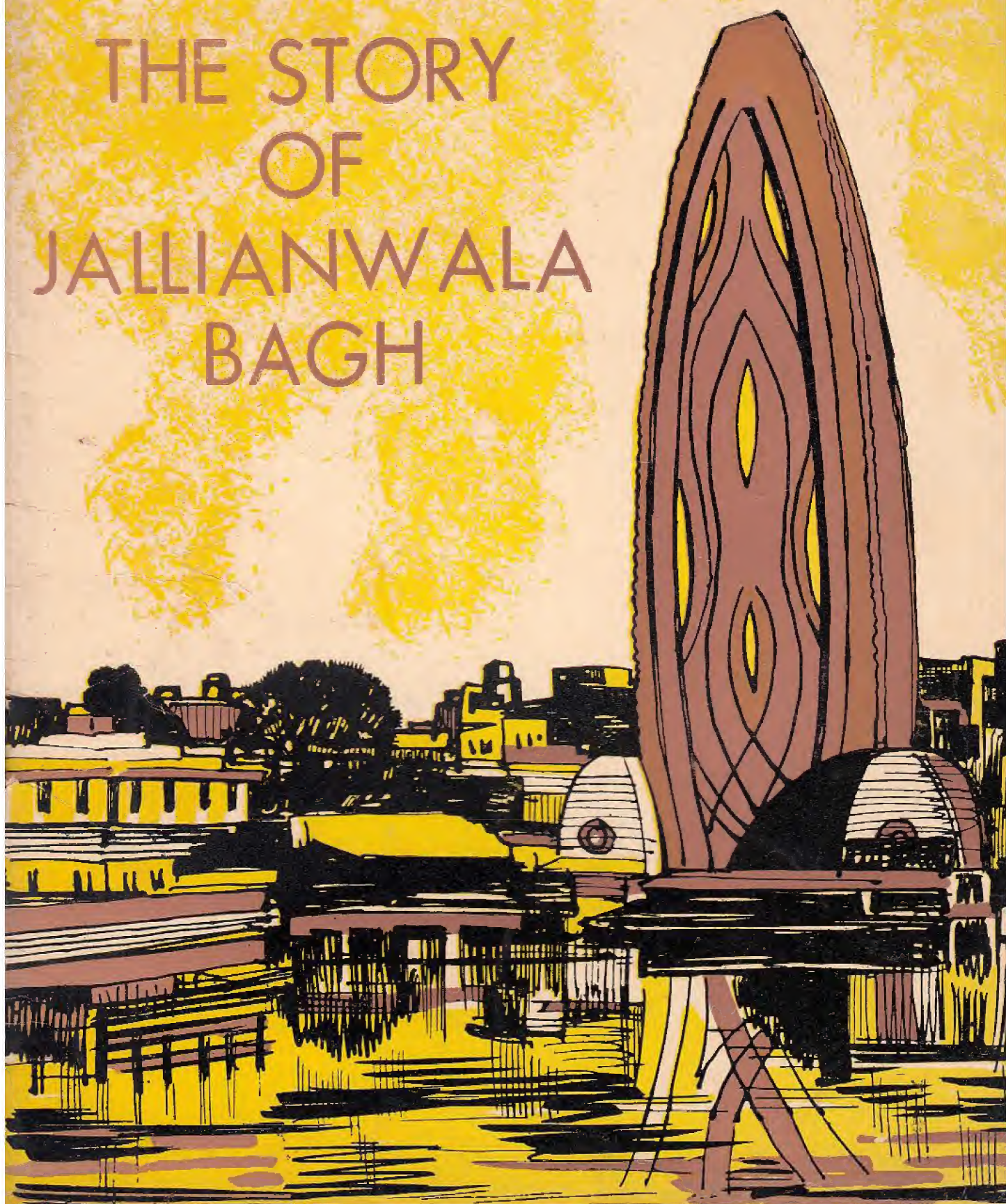


# THE STORY OF JALLIANWALA BAGH





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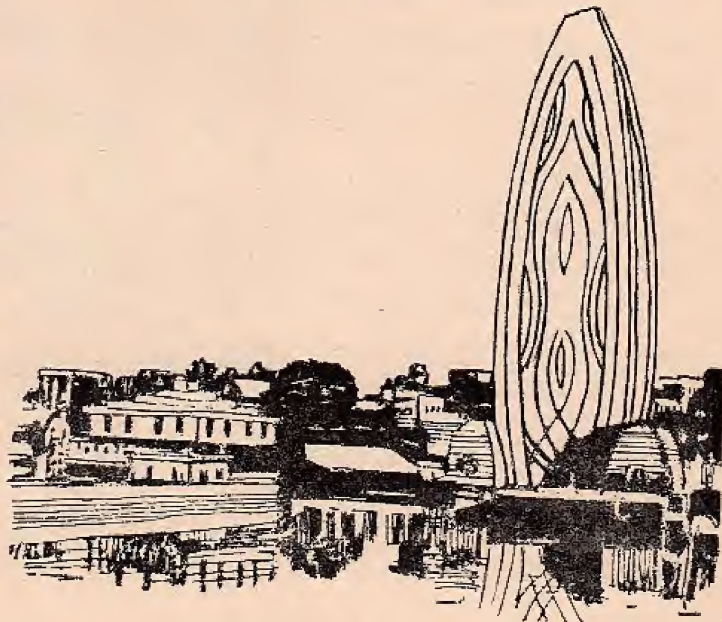
## I. The City of Jallianwala Bagh

THE CITY of Amritsar in Punjab is famous all over the country for its Golden Temple. People come from far and near to visit this magnificent temple and offer prayers there. Not very far from the temple is another place where people go to pay their homage. This place is known as Jallianwala Bagh.

Jallianwala Bagh is no temple like the Golden Temple or any other place of worship. Still it is a sacred place and people go there to pay homage to a sacred memory. It was here, nearly sixty years ago, that hundreds of brave Indians laid down their lives for the cause of national honour and independence. On April 13, 1919, they defied the bullets of an English General and his men. On this April day every year the nation gratefully remembers these martyrs. On April 13, 1969, we observed the fiftieth anniversary of this great martyrdom.

You would naturally like to know what happened on that day; why and how those brave people laid down their lives and what is the significance of that event for us. To understand all this, it is necessary to know the events preceding this great martyrdom.

*People go to Jallianwala Bagh to pay homage to a sacred memory.*





## 2. How India Fought Britain's War

**Y**OU MUST have read about the First World War. This war was fought during the years 1914 to 1918 between Britain and its allies on the one side and Germany and its allies on the other. Our country at that time was being ruled by the British. So when the British went to war with Germany, India was dragged into the war. The people of India were never consulted on this matter. They were just ordered to join in fighting the war.

A great war requires a lot of money and men. The British Government did their best to get as much money and as many men as possible to fight the war. A large part of this burden was shared by India. To collect money from the people, the Government increased taxes.

Pressure was put on the people in a number of ways to get money for the war loans. When



*At times, police parties raided villages at night and carried away young men for the army.*



people did not volunteer to fight, what was in fact Britain's war, the British authorities used harsh methods to recruit people to the army. At times, police parties raided villages at night and carried away young men for the army. The villagers who refused to send their sons to the army were even refused water to irrigate their lands. Thousands of Indians were thus forced to join the army against their wishes.

In the army also, the Indians were not treated well. The highest rank an ordinary Indian could get in the army was that of a Risaldar-Major. The Indians were never trained to be officers. In fact it was thought that they were unfit to be officers. They were recruited to fight the battle for British for a monthly salary of eleven rupees.

Nature was also very unkind to the Indian people. Throughout the war period, the people suffered from epidemics like cholera, plague, malaria and influenza. The Government did not do anything to help them because it was engaged in the war. The people were left to themselves. In the influenza epidemic people died like flies and at places entire villages were completely wiped out. Even the Government admitted that over 12 crore people suffered from the disease of which about one crore and thirty lakh died. The actual number of people who suffered and died is believed to have been much higher. You can well imagine the amount of suffering the people had to undergo at that time. The grief-stricken people felt very angry because they were left at the mercy of the disease and no medical help was given to them.

Before the influenza epidemic broke out, there was a complete failure of monsoon in the country. This led to famine conditions. The prices of food-grains and other things started rising. The condition of the poor became very miserable. They did not have enough money to buy food which was becoming costlier every day. And when they fell ill, they could not get any medicines. As against this, a few big landlords and traders made huge profits during the war and became very wealthy.

All this made people very unhappy. They were very angry with the Government. Some of them raised their voice in protest but they were punished harshly.



### 3. How India was Rewarded

**T**HE GOVERNMENT was only concerned with the war and preservation of the empire. They did not want people to raise their voice against them. The British authorities appointed a committee to suggest ways of dealing with people who raised their voice to put forward their grievances. This committee was known as the Sedition Committee. The president of the committee was a British judge named Rowlatt. The committee, therefore, popularly came to be known as the Rowlatt Committee and its report as the Rowlatt Report.

Just before the Rowlatt Committee was appointed, the British Government had promised that Indians would be given more self-government. Later events proved that the British Government did not mean what they said and only used this promise to keep the people quiet. Not knowing the British motive, people had hoped that the Government would do something to give them more rights.

Therefore, the appointment of the Rowlatt Committee came as a rude shock to the people. If the Government wanted to help the people it should give them more freedom. Why should it appoint a committee to suggest methods of dealing with the aggrieved people? This made them lose faith in the Government. The appointment of the committee had enraged the people. But its report increased their anger.

The report pictured Indian freedom-fighters as dacoits and robbers. It recommended that these people should be dealt with very severely and the Government should be given special powers to deal with them.

The Indian people were very much hurt when they came to know about the Report. The British Government had won the war with their help. The people had to undergo a lot of hardship because of the war. But they had some hope that all their suffering would not go in vain and the British Government would give them self-government. But the Government was trying to increase its own powers to deal with those who asked for their rights. And Indian patriots were branded as criminals, robbers and dacoits. People's anger, therefore, knew no bounds.

In the hour of their victory, the British Government forgot their promises. There was a change in their attitude. They now felt free to deal with Indians in whatever manner they wanted. They were interested not in the reforms, but in implementing the report of the Rowlatt Committee.



They did not pay heed to the people's demand that the Rowlatt Report should be ignored.

#### 4. The Black Bill

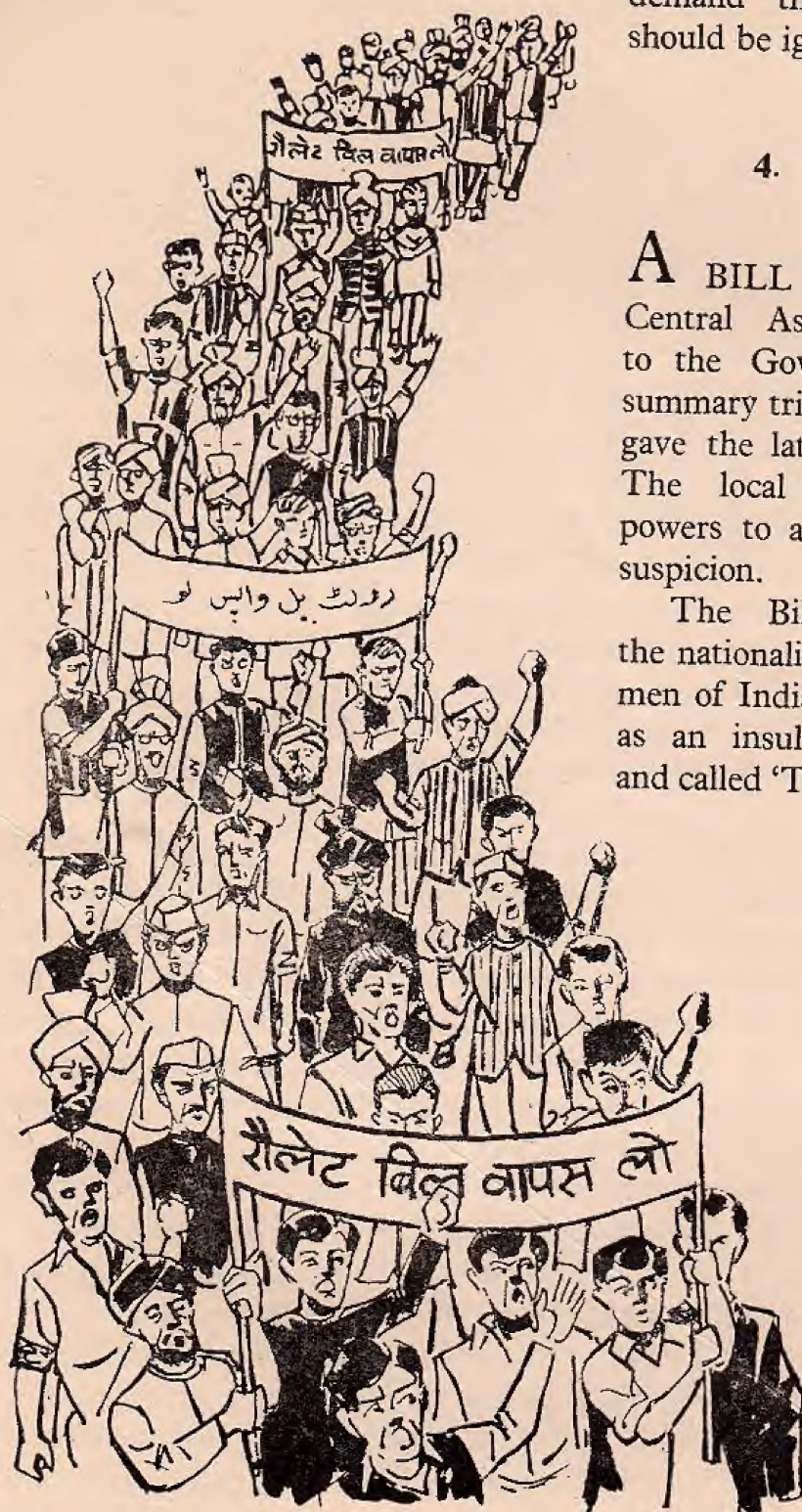
A BILL was introduced in the Central Assembly. It gave power to the Government to carry out summary trials of revolutionaries. It gave the latter no right to appeal. The local authorities were given powers to arrest persons merely on suspicion.

The Bill was aimed at crushing the nationalist spirit among the young men of India. It was rightly regarded as an insult to the Indian nation and called 'The Black Bill'. There were

protests against the Bill all over the country. Day after day protest meetings were held against the Bill.

In spite of great public resentment, the Bill was made into law. The Act came to be known as the Rowlatt Act.

*There were protests against the Rowlatt Bill all over the country.*





The Rowlatt Act was a challenge to the Indian people. Indians had no alternative but to accept this challenge. The question was how they should fight the unfair rulers.

Fortunately for them, Mahatma Gandhi was there to lead them. They found in him a selfless leader with high ideals. He had done a lot of work for Indians in South Africa. This work had already made him popular among Indians at home. He had been watching the situation in India very closely.

### 5. Mahatma Gandhi Takes the Lead

THE PEOPLE looked towards Mahatma Gandhi for the next step. He spent many sleepless nights thinking out a plan of action for Indians. After great thinking, he decided to start a people's movement. He gave this movement the name of Satyagraha. Satyagraha means insistence on truth. The immediate object of the Satyagraha movement was to compel the Government to withdraw the Rowlatt Act. Mahatma Gandhi also had a larger purpose in view. He decided on this movement as the start of the struggle for freedom.

Mahatma Gandhi's movement was unique in many respects. First, he did not want this movement to be a secret movement. Everything about the movement was known to the Government and the public. Second, it was a non-violent movement. In no case was violence to be used by the people. Those who offered Satyagraha had to be prepared for any hardship. According to him, if our object is good and we try to attain it through bad means it is not worthwhile. The object should be good, so also the means and methods used to attain the object.

Mahatma Gandhi used to inform the Government about his future plans in advance. So he wrote to the Viceroy that he was going to start a Satyagraha movement. The Government was in no mood to listen to him. He and his followers took a Satyagraha pledge. It said that they would not obey unjust laws and would not rest till they were withdrawn. They also pledged to follow truth and refrain from violence.

Mahatma Gandhi was not feeling well. Still he travelled from one part of the country to another. He explained his programme to the people. He told the people that they should behave with the Government as Prahlad had





*Mahatma Gandhi travelled from one part of the country to another and explained his programme to the people.*

behaved with his father Hiranyakasipu. Prahlad, as you know, was an obedient son. But when his father asked him to do a wrong thing, Prahlad could not obey him. Even so, he had no ill-will towards his father. Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi said that we should not obey the unjust orders of the Government but we should do so without any ill-will towards it.

People gave him warm reception wherever he went. They offered to follow him in the hour of struggle.

## **6. Punjab Follows the Mahatma**

**M**AHATMA GANDHI asked the people to observe a Hartal on April 6, 1919. The entire country responded magnificently. There was a complete Hartal throughout the country on that day. All work stopped. All markets and business places were closed. People observed a 24-hour fast. Public meetings were held all over the country to protest against the Rowlatt Act.

The Government became panicky. It tried to terrorise the people. There were firings at Delhi, Lahore and Amritsar. Things were going from bad to worse in the Punjab. The people there were dealt with very severely.



They appealed to Mahatma Gandhi to visit their province.

Mahatma Gandhi left Bombay to be with the people of Punjab. He was not allowed to enter Punjab. On the way he was taken into custody and taken by train back to Bombay.

The news of Mahatma Gandhi's arrest made people throughout India very angry. There were demonstrations and disturbances in various parts of the country. The police used all its force to put down the demonstrations.

The people of Punjab were in the forefront of Mahatma Gandhi's movement. They had observed complete Hartal on the 6th of April. In Amritsar itself not a single shop opened on that day. The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs jointly held a demonstration. The demonstration was peaceful and there was not a single incident of violence. A huge public meeting was held in the city to protest against the Rowlatt Act. About 50,000 people attended this meeting. The leaders told the people, "Do not injure anyone but be ready to be injured."

Three days later was Ram Naumi. Ram Naumi, as you know, is a big Hindu festival. The people of Amritsar decided to celebrate it as a National Solidarity Day. They took out a huge procession. The processionists shouted slogans like "Hindu Musalman ki Jai", "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai". This procession was absolutely peaceful.

The Lt.-Governor of Punjab at that time was an Englishman named Sir Michael O'Dwyer. He was a very tough Englishman who thought that Indians must be kept under British rule by use of force. He was very angry with the people of Punjab because they followed Mahatma Gandhi's order and observed complete Hartal. He was also angry because Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were acting like brothers against the Government. He decided in his mind to teach the people of Punjab a lesson. He was waiting for an opportunity to do so.

The people in Amritsar were led by two young leaders Dr. Kichlew and Dr. Satyapal. O'Dwyer gave orders that they should be arrested immediately. They were arrested by the police and taken out of the city. This was the day on which Mahatma Gandhi had been detained while coming to Punjab. The news of their arrest spread throughout Amritsar like wild fire.

The people immediately closed their shops and all business came to a stop. They took out a procession demanding the release of their leaders. The authorities refused to listen to their just demand. On the other hand, police opened fire on them. Many innocent persons were killed and wounded.



The people carried the killed and the wounded on their shoulders. The blood of their relatives and friends made them angry. They went out of control and set on fire some public and European property. They also killed some Englishmen.

This is exactly what Michael O'Dwyer was waiting for. The army was immediately sent to Amritsar. The Commander of this army unit was one Brigadier-General Dyer. Dyer and his army took control of the entire city. Hundreds of persons were arrested without any reason. The city of Amritsar became an armed camp.

## 7. The Massacre at Amritsar

**13TH** OF April, 1919 ! It was a Sunday and the day of Baisakhi. In Punjab, the festival of Baisakhi is celebrated with great enthusiasm.

On that Baisakhi day, thousands of people had come to Amritsar from nearby villages. They had come to pray at the Golden Temple and have a bath in its sacred tank.

Not very far from the Golden Temple is Jallianwala Bagh. At that time Jallianwala Bagh was very much different from what it looks like today. Now it is a very well-maintained garden, with a huge pylon inside, built in honour of those who died there.



*The entry to Jallianwala Bagh was through a narrow lane.*



Sixty years back, Jallianwala Bagh was not a garden as its name suggested. It was a waste space in the heart of the city used for fairs and public meetings. This space was enclosed on all four sides by the backwalls of the houses built all around. The entry to Jallianwala Bagh was through a narrow lane. There were no other regular exits though at four or five points one could get out through narrow openings.

It had been announced that a meeting would be held at the Jallianwala Bagh in the evening of the Baisakhi day. Dyer wanted to frighten the people. He marched his army through the city in the morning. He announced that he would shoot people who attended the meeting.

The brave people of Amritsar were not afraid of Dyer's threat. They decided to attend the meeting as announced. At the fixed time about 20,000 people had gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh. They wanted to protest against the unjust laws passed by the Government. In the crowd were men, women and children of all communities. All of them were unarmed. They were not afraid of the police and army which was posted everywhere in the city.

The meeting had started. Speaker after speaker pleaded with the Government to withdraw the Rowlatt Act. As the meeting was in progress, General Dyer entered the Bagh through the narrow passage with his army.

*Immediately the army men took position near the entrance and within seconds they started firing.*





Immediately the army men took position near the entrance. Within seconds, they started firing.

All this happened within a matter of minutes. The peaceful crowd did not even know what was happening. The firing went on for over 10 minutes. In all 1,650 rounds of ammunition were fired. General Dyer stopped shooting only when ammunition was all used up.

The firing was directed towards places where the crowd was the thickest. This was done to kill as many people as possible. Hundreds of people were killed on the spot. Every corner of the Bagh was full of people dead and dying. There was blood all over the place.

Hundreds of Indians died at Jallianwala Bagh on that day. The wounded were left by Dyer there in the Bagh. There was no one to give them medical aid. Curfew was in force in the city in the evening. Nobody could, therefore, move out to help the wounded. They had to lie in pain there throughout the night.

The cruelties did not end with Jallianwala Bagh. More followed. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar said to the people, "The revenge will be taken upon you and your children." Hundreds of people were whipped in streets. All Indians passing through a certain street were made to crawl on their bellies.

Like the people of Amritsar, people in other cities of Punjab were also treated very badly. The army took over the entire province. It used brutal force to suppress the people. Even the aeroplanes were used to fire



*Hundreds of people were whipped in streets.*



at innocent people. People were ordered to salute every Englishman they saw on the streets. Lawyers were given orders to work as constables and even as coolies. For even minor offences, people were flogged in public. Thousands of persons were arrested and kept in jail for months. Students were made to walk miles daily and report at the police stations. All this was done against unarmed, non-violent citizens.

### 8. A People in Rage

**T**HE EVENTS in Punjab shocked the people throughout India.



*Mahatma Gandhi was allowed to enter Punjab only after six months.*



Mahatma Gandhi wanted to go to Punjab immediately to share the suffering of its people. The Government did not let him enter the province. He made many appeals to the Viceroy but with no result.

He was allowed to enter Punjab only after six months. When he reached Lahore, lakhs of people received him at the station. The people were very happy to see him after a long time. He went from place to place and listened to the stories of people's suffering.

The Congress appointed a committee to report on the events in Punjab. The committee said that the Government of Sir O'Dwyer was responsible for people's suffering. The report also said that it was the Government which provoked the people every time. It said that the Rowlatt Act should be taken back and Sir O'Dwyer and General Dyer relieved of their offices.

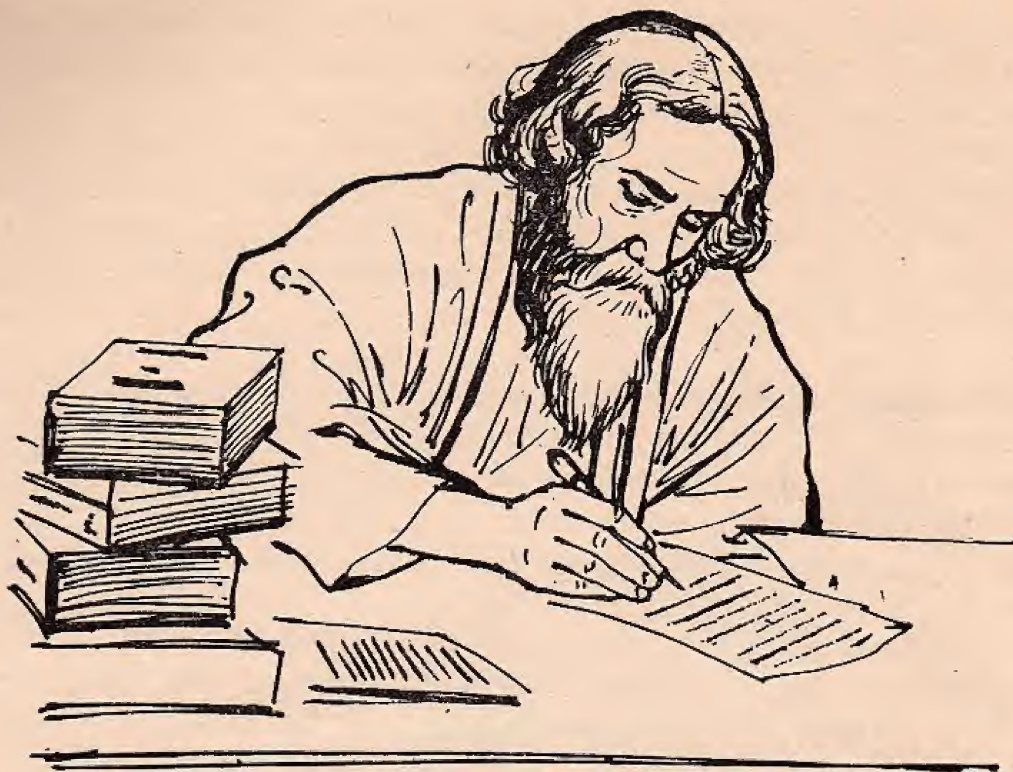
The Government of India also appointed a committee to make an enquiry. This committee had seven members—four Europeans and three Indians. Even this committee criticised General Dyer for his conduct. The Indian members of the committee held Sir Michael O'Dwyer also responsible.

But the Government of India praised Sir O'Dwyer for his "great experience and courage". The British Government in London, taking the cue, also praised Sir O'Dwyer though it asked General Dyer to resign.

Many people in England sympathised with Indians in their suffering. They thought that General Dyer had behaved in an uncivilised manner. But there were some who believed that Indians should be suppressed, and should be taught a lesson whenever they asked for self-government. These people naturally were with General Dyer and when he was asked to resign, they raised money for him. The House of Lords, the Upper House of the British Parliament, went to the extent of passing a resolution in support of General Dyer.

The people in India were already very angry. This increased their anger beyond limit. Whatever little faith they had in the justice and fair-play of the British Government vanished. India's national poet Rabindranath Tagore returned the honour and title the British had given him. He said, "The late events have conclusively proved that our true salvation lies in our own hands."





*Poet Rabindranath Tagore returned the honour  
and title the British had given him.*

### **9. Jallianwala Gives Strength to People**

**T**HE CRUELITIES at Jallianwala Bagh were meant to frighten the people of India. But the Government completely failed in its objective. Instead of being afraid, the people of India were angry. Even in anger they did not lose their head. They decided to continue the fight for their rights peacefully. Jallianwala Bagh gave them more strength and courage to do so.

Mahatma Gandhi said to the people, "Jallianwala Bagh is only a beginning." He said, we must be prepared to face cruelties like this with courage. Even if many thousand more Indians are murdered, we should not be upset. He said, "All concerned will *take* rather than *lose* heart and treat hanging as an ordinary affair of life."

Lala Lajpat Rai, who was known as the Lion of Punjab, said, "There



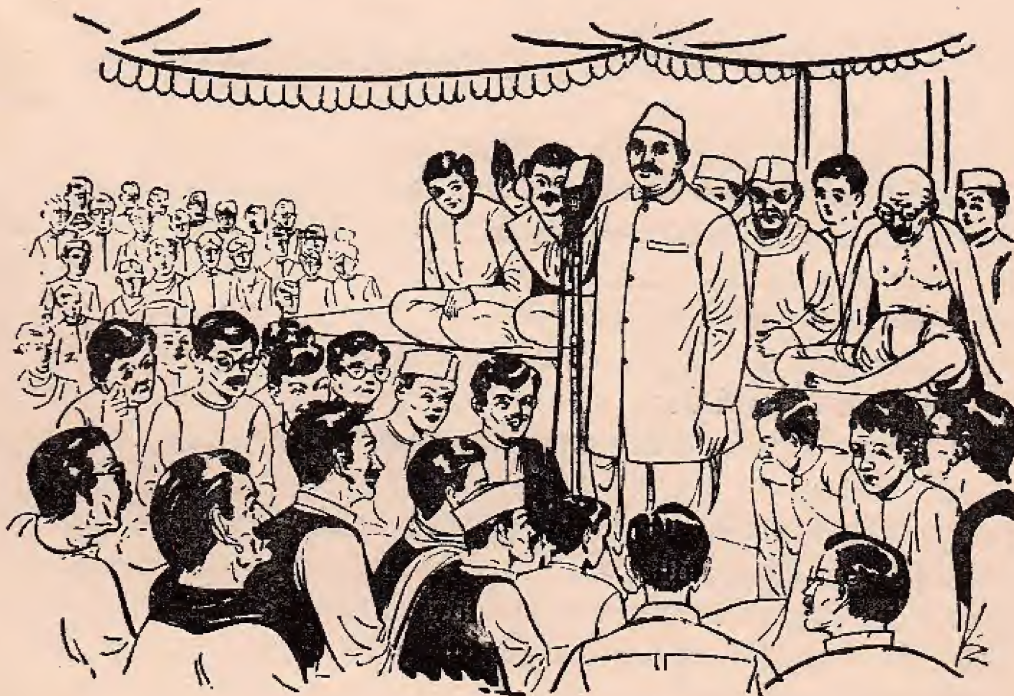
is a dawn of a new day—the dawn of a new spirit. The year 1919 shall be memorable in the history of India not for the Reforms Act but for Jallianwala Bagh.”

Jallianwala Bagh completely changed the mood of Indians. They now knew very well that they could no longer depend on the goodwill of the British Government. A wall had come up between the Government and the people. This wall drew them apart for ever afterwards. After this great tragedy, the people of India took to the path of complete break with the British Government.

The annual session of the Congress took place at Calcutta that year. Lala Lajpat Rai was the President of the Congress. He said, “We are no longer content with resolutions, prayers and memorials. We have advanced from the first stage of very humble submission. We are in the throes of a momentous struggle.”

The Congress met again at Amritsar towards the end of that year. The President of the Amritsar Congress was Shri Motilal Nehru. He said, events in Punjab had one lesson for us. We should follow the path of hard work, the path of sacrifice, of patience and deed.

*Lala Lajpat Rai said, “We are no longer content with resolutions, prayers and memorials.”*





The Amritsar Congress has been described as the first Gandhi Congress. Mahatma Gandhi now became the unquestioned leader of entire India. The Congress and the people started looking to him for guidance as never before.

The Congress declared Swarajya as its goal. It said that now there was no course left open to the people of India but to adopt the policy of non-cooperation with the Government. It launched a programme of surrender of titles and honorary offices. People were asked to resign from nominated seats and local bodies. They were asked to boycott foreign goods and Government functions. Students were to withdraw from the Government institutions. British-run courts and elections were to be boycotted. People were asked to use only Indian things and wear khadi.

There was now no going back from the path of struggle. The non-cooperation movement soon gathered momentum. This was the real beginning of the Gandhi movement—the movement as a result of which we got our freedom in 1947.

Jallianwala Bagh was the turning point in India's fight for freedom. It was the beginning of the end of British rule. A well-known historian has said, "If at Plassey, the foundations of British domination were laid, at Amritsar they were shaken."

How true !

## 10. A Young Man Takes Revenge

AS YOU already know, General Dyer had left the dead and wounded Indians at Jallianwalla Bagh and gone away. There was no one to help them. There was curfew in the town. Very few persons dared come to Jallianwala Bagh to help the wounded.

Among those daring people were some orphan boys from the city. They went to the Bagh after firing. They risked their life to render help to the dying and the wounded. They were deeply moved by the suffering of their countrymen.

Among these boys was a young man of twenty named Udham Singh. After coming back from Jallianwala Bagh at night, he could not sleep at all. Throughout the night the scene at Jallianwala Bagh kept coming before his eyes. He had been moved beyond grief by what he had seen at Jallianwala Bagh. He took a vow that he would avenge the murder of innocent Indians.





*Udham Singh managed to shoot O'Dwyer dead at a public meeting.*

Soon after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy General Dyer went away to England. O'Dwyer followed him after some time. Any other person would have forgotten about his vow but Udham Singh was a young man of great determination. He decided to follow both of them to England.

To go to England he needed a lot of money. He had to work hard for years to earn this money.

When he reached England, General Dyer had already died. Udham Singh started following O'Dwyer. He was waiting for an opportunity to fulfil his vow. One day he managed to shoot O'Dwyer dead at a public meeting.

After shooting O'Dwyer dead, Udham Singh did not try to run away. He quietly stood where he was and let the police arrest him. He told the judge a few days later, "He (O'Dwyer) deserved it. I don't care. I do not mind dying. I am dying for my country." He was sentenced to death and executed.

This happened nearly twenty-one years after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.





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